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ABSTRACT

A study examined composition textbooks to determine any trends in composition instruction from 1900 to 1959. The study period was divided into three periods--1900 to 1917, 1918 to 1935, and 1936 to to 1959--and three textbooks from each period were content analyzed. A categorical framework was formulated, permitting allocation of tasks found withing each volume into one of 12 categories, each depicting a separate facet of English language instruction. Trend analysis was performed for all 12 categories to test whether changes had occurred in the amount of time allocated each aspect of language instruction. Ascending linear trends in the data revealed increased amounts of time allocated both to oral language activities unrelated to writing and to related skills. Descending linear trends reflected decreased amounts of instructional time allocated to such facets of writing instruction as modeling, oral prewriting strategies, word development, letter writing, and prose writing. No significant changes were recorded for sentence construction, paragraph development, or grammar, all of which remained relatively constant throughout the 60-year interval. The majority of categories reflecting declining trends pertained to the written word. Oral language exercises, though not necessarily those linked to writing, were increasingly favored. (HTH)

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TRENDS IN WRITTEN COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS 1900-1959

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TRENDS IN WRITTEN COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION
IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS, 1900-1959

This retrospective was designed to determine major trends in written composition instruction. Eliciting trends in the data involved: (1) apportioning the sixty year interval into three roughly equal periods (1900-1917, 1918-1935, and 1936-1959); (2) selecting nine English language textbook series published between 1900 to 1959, with three from each period; (3) formulating a categorical framework for content analysis; and (4) performing trend analysis for each of the twelve pre-selected facets of language instruction: (1) modeling; (2) oral language exercises related to writing; (3) oral language exercises unrelated to writing; (4) words; (5) sentences; (6) paragraphs; (7) letter writing; (8) prose; (9) variegated forms; (10) grammar and mechanics; (11) skills; and (12) residuals.

Generally speaking, categories related to the written word reflected descending trends with less instructional emphasis; categories related to oral language reflected ascending trends with more instructional emphasis. Those nineteenth century stalwarts--grammar, sentence construction, and vocabulary development--continued receiving the major amount of instructional emphasis throughout the sixty year interval, with no significance in the changes recorded from period to period.

Deriving from pronouncements of national committees in the 1890s, interest in written composition grew as the study of English became the cornerstone of the elementary school curriculum and the main channel of culture and knowledge (Baker and Thorndike, 1912). Although composition instruction at the secondary level had been well-researched by Bernhardt (1963), Judy (1967), Flanigan (1969), Botts (1970), Whitman (1973), Fay (1979), and others, instruction at the elementary level had not; the emergence, crystallization, and development of so central a portion of the elementary curriculum remained unclear. To remedy the situation somewhat, a survey of representative elementary school English textbooks published between 1900 and 1959 was undertaken with the express purpose of placing "composition" instruction into historical perspective. The design and results of that study are as follows.

Design of the Study

In order to elicit trends in composition instruction for the period 1900 to 1959, the following steps were taken:

1. The sixty year investigative period was apportioned into three roughly equal periods--1900 to 1917, 1918 to 1935, and 1936 to 1959. The year 1900, in addition to marking the turn of the century, witnessed the establishment of uniform college entrance requirements throughout the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic States, requirements which had the effect of molding "top-down" the curricula of both elementary and secondary schools. The two other chronological demarcations of the study, 1917-1918, and 1935-1936, were watershed years witnessing the publication of landmark reports by nationally-recognized authorities. The Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools, by James Hosic, was issued in 1917; the Experience Curriculum in English, sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and prepared by a committee chaired by Wilbur Hatfield, was issued in 1935. The concluding year of the study represented that point in time a which the intellectual processes were thought to be conditioned more by video than by print--a point of cultural revolution every bit as far-reaching as had been the invention of movable print back in the mid-1400s.

2. A total of nine representative English language textbooks series, intended for use in the elementary school, were selected as the database, with

three series chosen for each of the three chronological periods. Criteria for determining "representativeness" of the genre were as follows: (a) the series' prime purpose was the dissemination of English language instruction in the elementary school; (b) the textbooks demonstrated a certain robustness, having either been published by recognized authorities, or reprinted numerous times, thereby attesting to their longevity; and (c) they were published by firms with nation-wide distribution capabilities. The textbooks, publishers, and dates of publication were as follows: Modern English Lessons, Newson and Company, 1902; Everyday English, Macmillan, 1912; McFadden Language Series, Rand McNally, 1915; New Essentials of English, American Book, 1921; Modern English, Macmillan, 1932; American Language Series, Rand McNally, 1932; Today's English, Merrill, 1936; Adventures in English, Allyn and Bacon, 1952; and the Good English series, published by Laidlaw in 1952.

3. A categorical framework was formulated, permitting an allocation of tasks found within each volume into one of twelve categories, each depicting a separate facet of English language instruction: (1) modeling or patterning exercises; (2) oral language exercises linked to writing; (3) oral language exercises without immediate application to writing; (4) word development; (5) sentence development; (6) paragraph construction; (7) letter writing; (8) prose; (9) variegated forms--dramatic skits, poems, riddles, etc; (10) grammar and mechanics; (11) tangentially related skills--notetaking, outlining, proofreading; and (12) residuals--a category of last resort for material such as arts and crafts, field trips, reviews and tests, deemed unclassifiable along the preceding lines.

4. By apportioning the investigative period into three discrete intervals, it was possible to test: (1) whether significant changes occurred over time for any of the twelve instructional categories, and (2) whether such differences could be described by either linear or quadratic trends. The level of probability was established a priori at the level $p<.10$; that is, significant differences were those whose likelihood of occurrence by chance was less than one in ten; statistically significant results were considered to have reflected real changes in the instructional aims and goals of textbooks examined.

Findings

Trend analysis was performed for all twelve categories to test whether changes had occurred in the amount of time allocated each aspect of language instruction between 1900 and 1959. Ascending linear trends in the data revealed increased amounts of time allocated to oral language activities unrelated to writing (#3) and to related skills (#11). Descending linear trends reflected decreased amounts of instructional time allocated to such facets as modeling (#1), oral language exercises used as pre-writing strategies (#2) word development (#4), letter writing (#7), and prose (#8). Quadratic trends, reflecting an increase in one period, followed by a decrease in the next, were registered for variegated forms (#9) and for residuals (#12). No significant changes were recorded for sentence construction (#5), paragraph development (#6), or grammar (#10) all of which remained relatively constant throughout the sixty year interval. See Appendices A through L.

Generally speaking, the majority of categories reflecting declining trends pertained to the written word; oral language exercises, though not necessarily those linked to writing, were increasingly favored; those nineteenth century die-hards, grammar, sentence and paragraph construction, plodded unerringly along, oblivious to changing times and shifting educational currents.

Discussion

Textbooks provided handy barometers for measuring educational trends. Influenced by the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, immigration, industrialization, instructional theories, and evolving psychological insights, textbooks revealed the extraordinary adaptiveness of the nation's schools as they struggled to keep abreast of changing times and pedagogical predilections.

During the first decade of the century, textbook authors, adhering to nineteenth century norms, strove to effect a literary atmosphere, in hopes of fostering an appreciation by students of "noble" literature and eminent thought. A wide array of literary selections for edification and emulation were interwoven among grammar drills and spelling exercises; scores of "memory gems" (fragments of prose and poetry) intended to strengthen memory, fortify

the spirit, and provide a commonality of experience were liberally sprinkled throughout the texts.

Due to the unprecedented number of immigrant children attending school, this period right after the turn-of-the-century was one of rapid expansion and upheaval for the public school system. With immigration peaking in 1907, upon the admission of well over a million persons in that single year, and with the schools faced with the monumental task of educating and Americanizing the "huddled masses," curricula were stripped of all literary trappings. Drastic measures were called for. All non-essentials were scrapped in an attempt to find time to teach those skills most in keeping with living, working, and fully participating in a democratic society. By the 1910s the tenor of textbooks changed radically, with the aesthetic yielding to the pragmatic; the long-esteemed goal of developing literary tastes gave way to more practical considerations of which language skills would hold students in best stead in the world of commerce. Oral language exercises became increasingly emphasized as teachers, fearful that the English language was on the verge of total corruption, mounted "crusades" enlisting children in the battle against slang or jargon, particularly as presented by those worst offenders of good speech--the comic book and the radio.

By the 1920s a number of new directions emerged: according to Ball (1920), one result of the earlier emphasis on oral language was a tendency for many teachers to teach without benefit of text, plunging many classrooms into a "semi-grammarless" age. Textbook authors, reflecting the cultural interest in science, emphasized the research-oriented premises of their language series. Interest in diagnostic testing and measurement, initially spawned by the Stanford-Binet measures of intelligence, led to increased differentiation of textbooks and a need for supplementary and compensatory materials.

By the 1930s teachers' manuals and students' workbooks were published in conjunction with textbooks. Lessons were interdisciplinary, with a mixture of language instruction and lessons drawn from the natural and social sciences. Unit formats, clustering language projects and activities into chapters replaced the erstwhile lesson-by-lesson structure, and indications of activity-centered, project-oriented curricula were much in evidence in elementary school textbooks. Moreover, the traditional pattern of formal language

instruction for grades three through eight, was altered by the inclusion of textbooks for grades one and two. Oral rehearsal, as a prewriting strategy, was abandoned. Oral and written language appeared farther apart than at any previous time. A general decline in written work paralleled the growth of the project-oriented curriculum. Socialized revision of composition involving peer teaching was much in favor; students, not teachers, were responsible for holding conferences with the writer and for questioning, evaluating, and judging the work. Undoubtedly, peer teaching was facilitated by group norms extolling cooperation over competition and the general well-being of the class as above that of any individual.

Textbooks throughout the 1920s and 1930s reflected the advent of a dazzling technology: page after page bore witness to the innovative genius of America, as the telegram, telephone, automobile, and "kodak" transformed the nation and its textbooks. Not so apparent were the effects of the Great Depression or World War I: references to "bad times" never surfaced in children's textbooks, yet their presence was obliquely felt by the increasing importance attributed to business, and to the readying of students for the workplace.

Stemming from interest in the experienced-based curriculum, a continued reshuffling of educational priorities throughout the 1940s and 1950s was apparent: academics were downplayed, as were those venerable learning techniques of memorization and rote learning; concern for personal and social growth surfaced. Teachers were cautioned about the natural timidity of young children and advised on the development of comfortable classroom environments. They were warned about the dangers of mandating creative writing and they were challenged to adopt less autocratic teaching methods. "In" was the vision of teacher as classroom facilitator; "out" was the remembrance of the dictatorial teacher of yesteryear.

By the 1950s, the precipitous fall from favor suffered by literary selections in language textbooks was nearly complete; literature and language instruction were effectively separated. Literary classics were no longer visible in language textbooks, but phonograph records did add another dimension. The voices of Maurice Evans as Hamlet, Raymond Massey as Abe Lincoln, and Otis and Cornelius Otis Skinner in scenes from Shakespeare now filled the

nation's classrooms. In a similar vein recommended reading lists attested to the demise of the classics, but also contained the names of writers who were destined to become the new classics in the field of children's literature: Jean de Brunhoff, A.A. Milne, Dr. Seuss, Margaret Wise Brown, and Robert McCloskey were but a few whose names surfaced as increased attention was given younger learners.

Also throughout the 1950s, textbooks reflected the growing significance of such fields as aviation, ocean transport, broadcasting, motion pictures, and the nascent television industry. Nevertheless, until this point in time, no one technological achievement so enormously reshaped the nature and emphases of the curriculum as did the telephone. The immediacy of an instrument that permitted individuals to speak over great distances as easily as over a backyard fence, altered communication patterns along the lines of oral cultures. As far back as the 1930s, as telephones connected more and more homes nationwide, textbook instruction formerly geared towards letter writing was superseded by that geared towards accomplishing the same thing-introduction, brief message, and closing--over the telephone.

Ease and speed of communication--fed by a stream of inventions beginning with the telegraph in 1895, the telephone in 1876, the radio in 1895, the television in 1920, and the first computer in 1930--were accelerating. Interestingly enough, there appeared to be a culturally determined, fifty year gap between the inception of a technological product and its accession by substantial numbers of American households. Likewise, educational ideas also took fifty years to gain acceptance.

Between 1900 and 1959, pedagogical practices and ideas were shaped not only by technology, but also by the social, economic, and cultural forces of each period. As the functions of schools expanded to meet the needs of an increasingly diversified and complex society, courses of study grew apace and textbooks became increasingly differentiated. And English language instruction, socially-conditioned and culturally-determined, malleable and re-active to the core, adapted to changing times and educational preferences.

Classroom Implications

Accepting the premise that most classroom teachers rely heavily upon textbooks for curriculum planning (Duffy, 1982), the textbook is the singularly most important determinant of what is or is not taught in the classroom. Allowing that it accurately reflects vacillating educational currents and cultural phenomena, and allowing, too, that school systems, in general, appear to play mostly a re-active rather that active role in sound change, the question originally raised by Postman (1979) regarding the information biases of the culture warrants further exploration. What in the preceding section was referred to as a fifty year gap between the introduction of an idea and its widespread dissemination throughout society, a gap which in a real sense operates as a protective buffer offering a measure of stability to our schools, eroded with the new information technology. Today, teaching machines and computer-aided instruction and interactive materials, closed circuit television, broadcast lectures, video cassette teaching packages, films, tapes, slides, and computer graphics face obsolescence after but a few years on the market. Whether teachers come to feel comfortable with this new technology remains an important determinant affecting the future of the textbook. Should they continue to rely upon the textbook for curriculum structure, the question becomes one of whether textbooks should continue to mirror the culture, or whether they should be directed towards balancing the one-on-one nature of so much of electronic software, thereby continuing to establish a sense of shared experience and community. This question goes to the very heart of the matter and should be of the utmost concern to educators and publishers of educational materials.

Conclusions

Just as all research includes a full measure of evanescent leads and abrupt dead ends, so too it has moments of serendipity. In the course of this investigation, the latter appeared whenever the seeds of ideas currently circulating in professional journals were found embedded in the pages of textbooks published over fifty years ago. Although it is impossible herein to discuss all such linkages, a few should suffice to illustrate the point.

Much ado has recently been made of "process" versus "product," yet the controversy appears to be little more than a chimera of the 1980s. In truth, good teachers have always been interested in process, that is, in the growth of the writer/reader-speaker/listener, otherwise known as student; they attended to the product insofar as it provided a measure of anticipated growth. But the idea of "process" is one far more in keeping with an era enamored of electromagnetic transfers of energy, a time in which the gerund is king: word-processing, text-processing, teleprocessing, central processing, conferencing, indexing, on-line searching are but a few of the buzzwords that daily convey the simultaneous and on-going nature of the technological revolution. So, too, the term "process" is more in keeping with the 1980s.

Concepts regarding the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing, the possibility of teaching reading through writing, and the importance of revision, originated not with Graves (1983), but with Baker and Thorndike (1912), nearly seventy years ago. Writing as a "process," one involving pre-writing activities such as the maintainance of personal logs or journals, was central to the textbook series by Burleson, Burleson, and Cash (1952), which even included caveats to the effect that writing was an on-going process, one that might necessitate a given piece being completed over a period of weeks. On another front, interest in the use of artistic activities to increase language output, an idea currently circulating in professional journals, flourished in textbooks of the 1930s, and could even be traced to Buehler's Modern English Lessons (1902). Moreover, the benefits of peer-teaching and of group-conferencing, currently in vogue, were readily apparent to Pearson and Kirchwey (1921) and Hosic and Hooper (1932). Socialized revision--children talking to other children regarding the merits and shortcomings of compositions--was the norm for all texts published during the 1930s.

With respect to teachers, the idea of teacher as reader/writer/researcher (Brause and Mayher, 1983) actually surfaced with McFadden (1915), who conducted the research upon which the bellwether McFadden Language Series was predicated. Ideas for stimulating teacher creativity and of de-emphasizing the role of the textbook as the primary determinant of curriculum was reflected in the Good English series by Shane and Ferris (1952).

In summation it can be said that over the sixty year investigative interval of this study, certain ideas appeared to bud, bloom, and wither on the vine, only to be reborn like the phoenix at some future date. Ideas surfacing in textbooks appeared to go in cycles reflecting the swing of the educational pendulum, one determined in great part by the needs of the workplace. The dual role of the textbook, as both an apostle of the new and a protector of the status quo, was clear. What remained unclear was what the role of the textbook should be in this rapidly dawning electronic age. Perhaps, as the body of research on the nature of verbal and non-verbal composing processes continues to evolve the answers to the question of how the textbook can best meet the needs of both students and society will be forthcoming.

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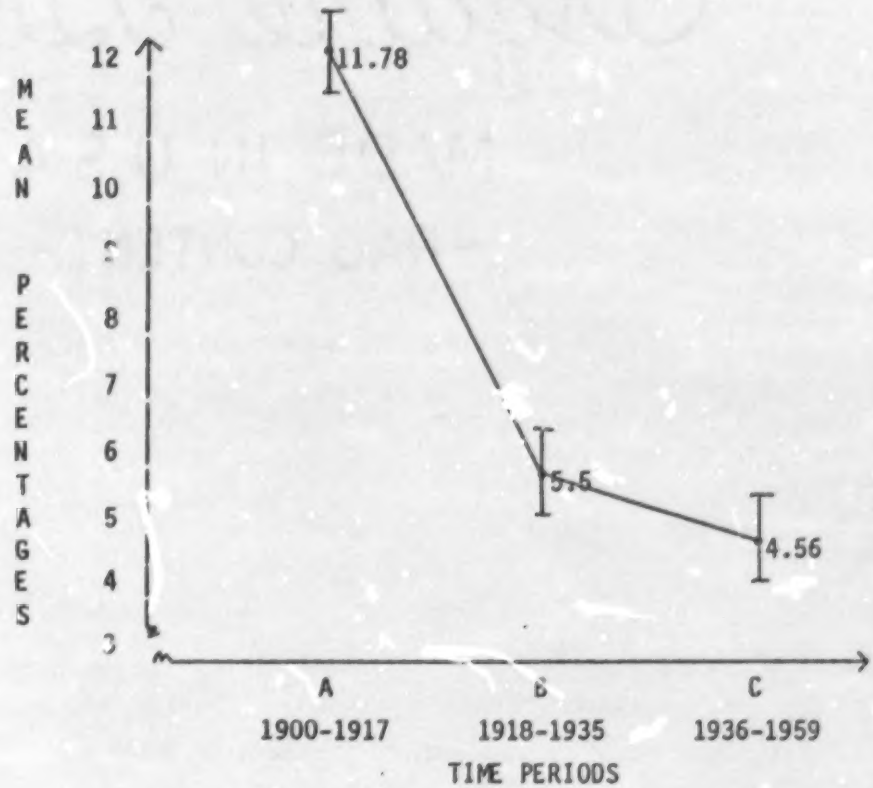
Trend Analysis of Factor One: Modeling



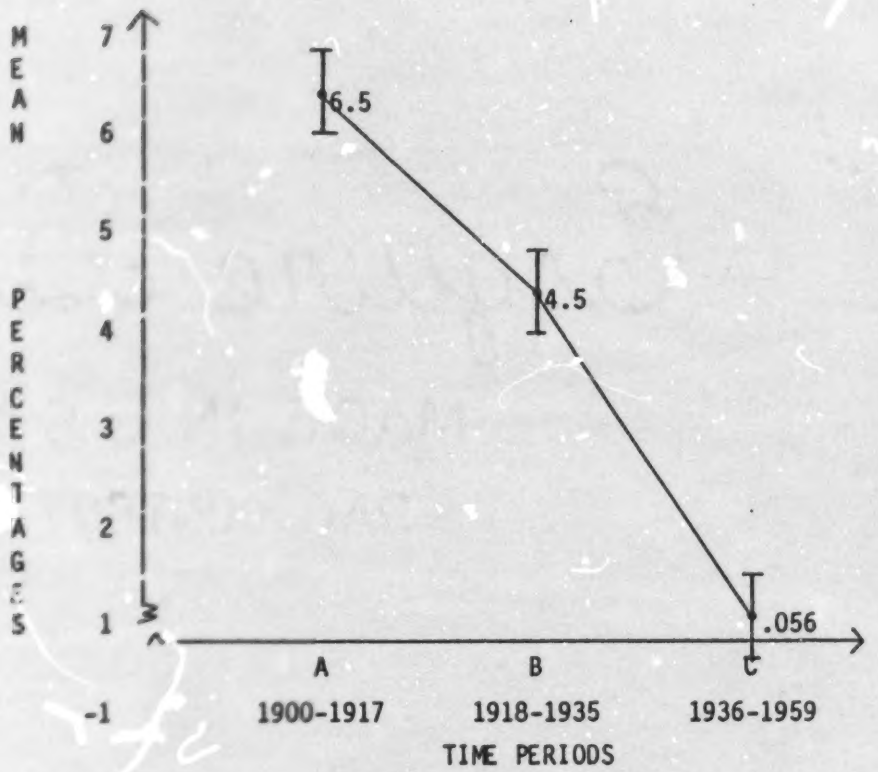
TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(505.09)	(2)		
Linear	597.36	1	597.36	23.86*
Quadratic	251.88	1	251.88	10.06**
S/A	1176.77	47	25.04	
TOTAL	1681.86	49		

* p<.001
** p<.01

Confidence interval LSI = $y \pm .505$

Trend Analysis of Factor Two: Oral Rehearsal

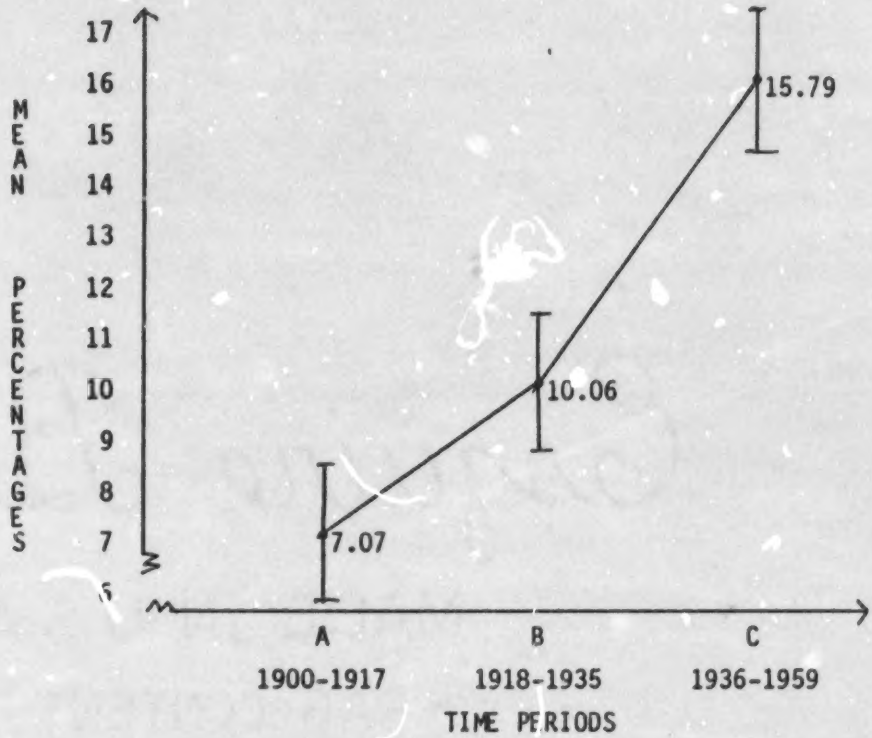


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(356.62)	(2)		
Linear	441.48	1	441.48	18.35*
Quadratic	.54	1	.54	<1
S/A	1130.69	47	24.06	
TOTAL	1487.31	49		* p<.001

Confidence interval LSI = y ± .495

Trend Analysis of Factor Three: Oral Exercises

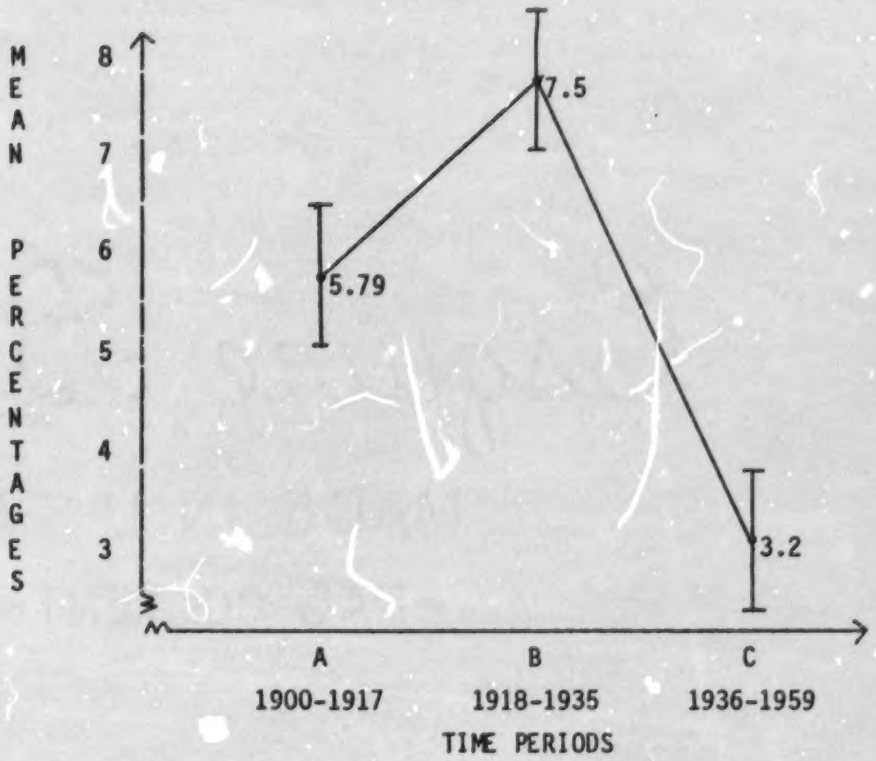


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(641)	(2)		
Linear	323.73	1	323.73	6.87*
Quadratic	32.28	1	32.28	<1
S/A	2214.12	47	47.11	
TOTAL	2855.12	49		* p<.025

Confidence interval LSI = $y \pm .695$

Trend Analysis of Factor Four: Words

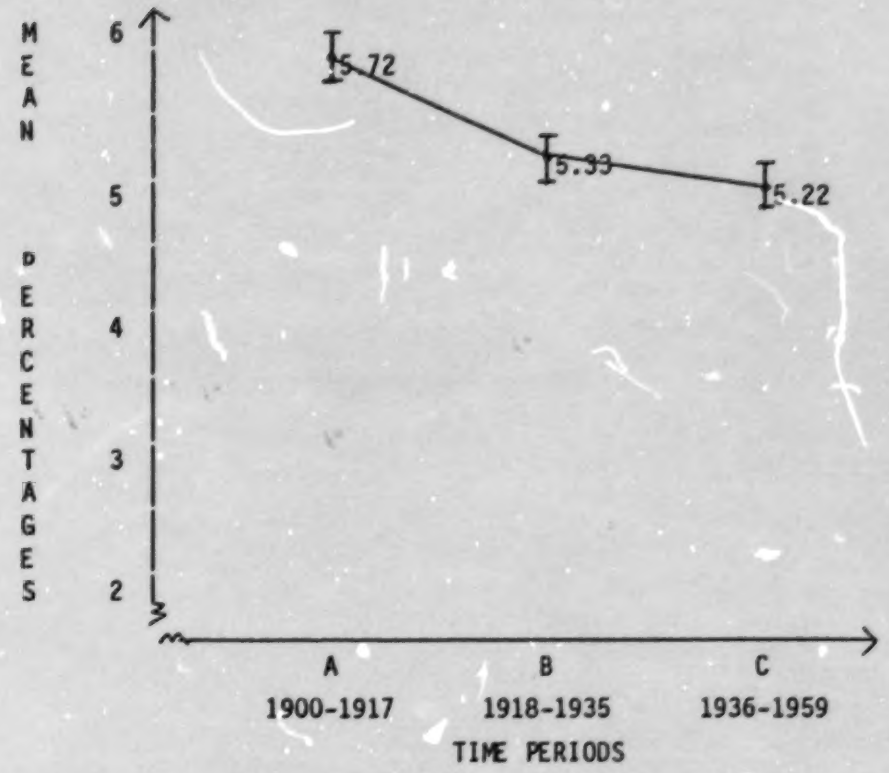


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(525)	(2)		
Linear	138.16	1	138.16	3.59*
Quadratic	33.11	1	33.11	<1
S/A	1807.57	47	38.46	
TOTAL	2332.57	49		* p<.10

Confidence interval LSI = $y \pm .695$

Trend Analysis of Factor Five: Sentences

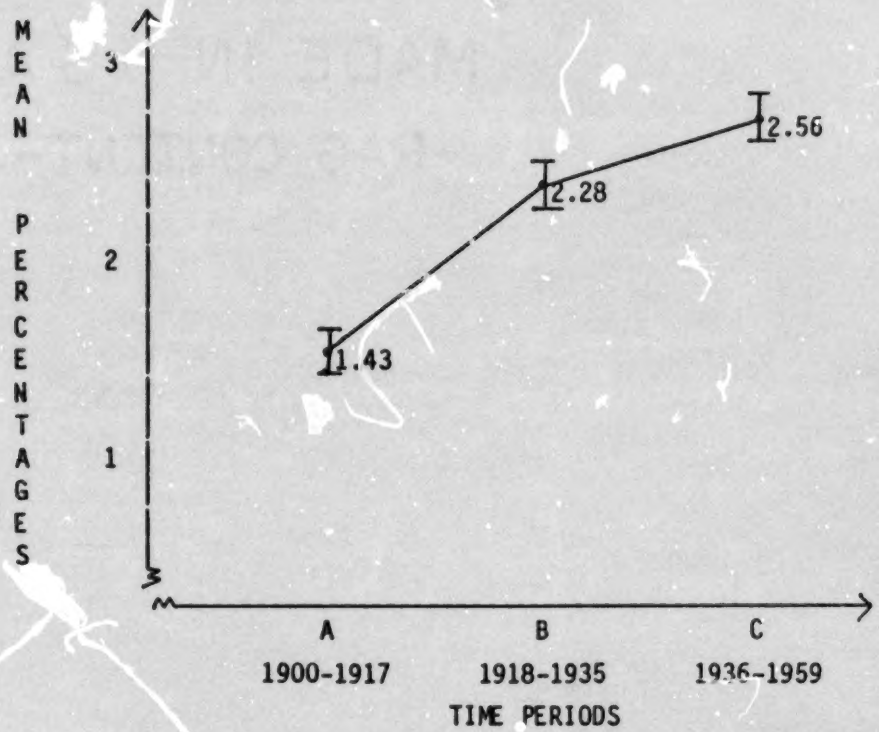


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(2.215)	(2)		
Linear	18.69	1	18.69	1.52
Quadratic	13.70	1	13.70	1.12
S/A	577.72	47	12.28	
TOTAL	579.31	49		

Confidence interval LSI = $y \pm .251$

Trend Analysis of Factor Six: Paragraphs

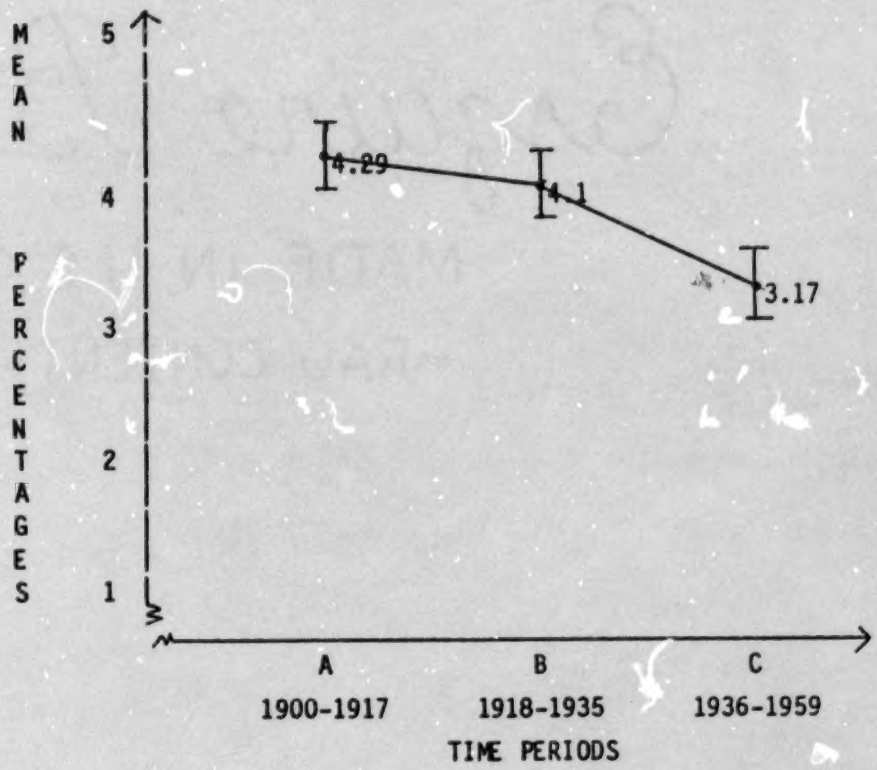


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(8.53)	(2)		
Linear	3.14	1	3.14	1.57
Quadratic	.16	1	.16	<1
S/A	93.95	47	1.99	
TOTAL	102.48	49		* p<.10

Confidence interval LSI = y $\pm$ .142

Trend Analysis of Factor Seven: Letter Writing

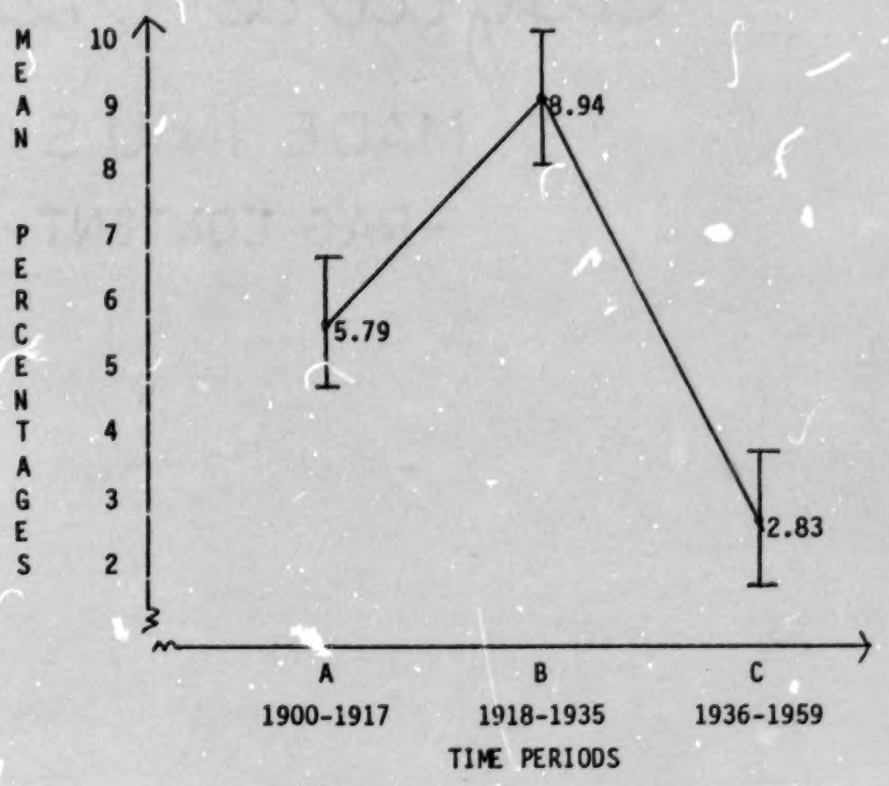


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(11.78)	(2)		
Linear	33.32	1	33.32	3.56*
Quadratic	1.65	1	1.65	<1
S/A	440.4	47	9.37	
TOTAL	452.1E	49		p<.10

Confidence interval LSI = y $\pm$ .309

Trend Analysis of Factor Eight: Prose



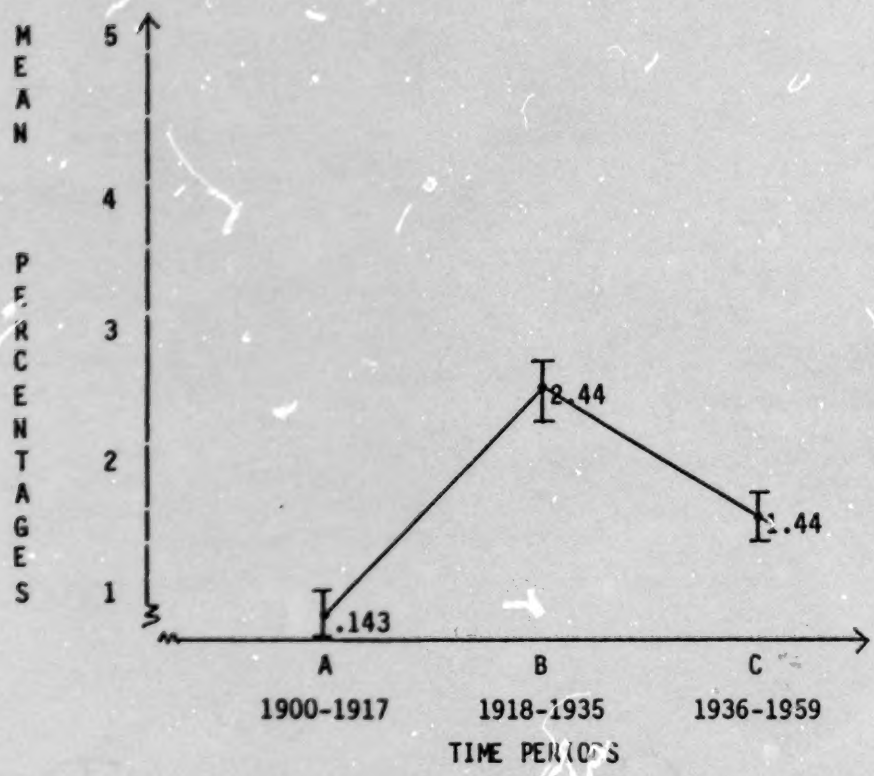
TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(306.04)	(2)		
Linear	182.26	1	182.26	17.68*
Quadratic	113.76	1	113.76	11.03**
S/A	484.49	47	10.31	
TOTAL	790.53	49		

* p<.10
** p<.01

Confidence interval LSI = $y \pm .649$

Trend Analysis of Factor Nine: Variegated Forms

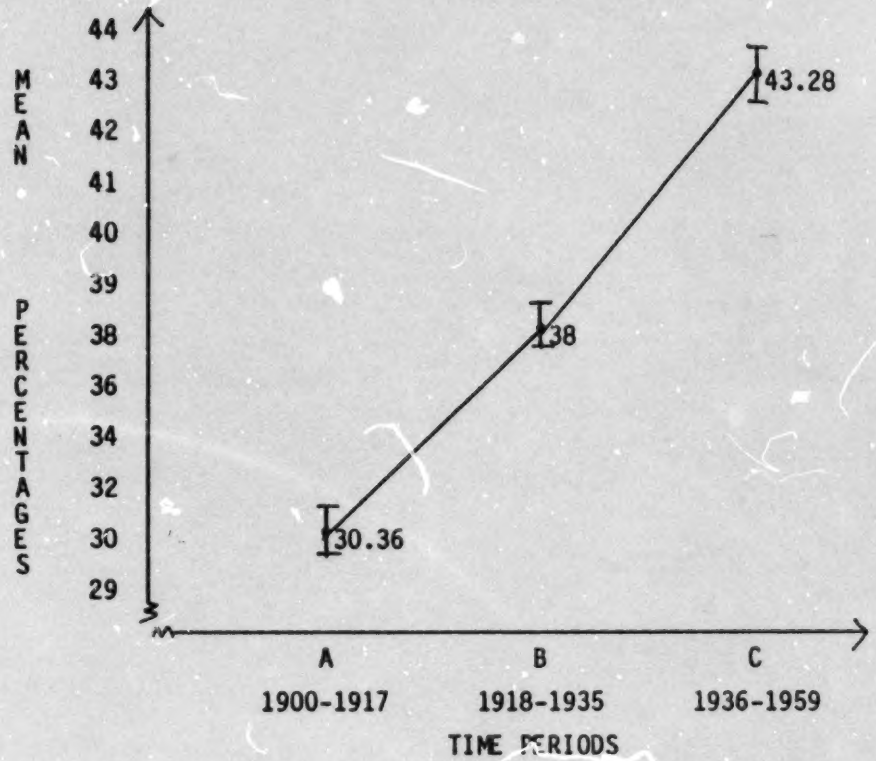


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(43.48)	(2)		
Linear	5.48	1	5.48	1.48
Quadratic	27.86	1	27.86	7.51*
S/A	174.39	47	3.71	
TOTAL	217.87	49		* p<.01

Confidence interval $LSI = \bar{y} \pm .195$

Trend Analysis of Factor Ten: Grammar

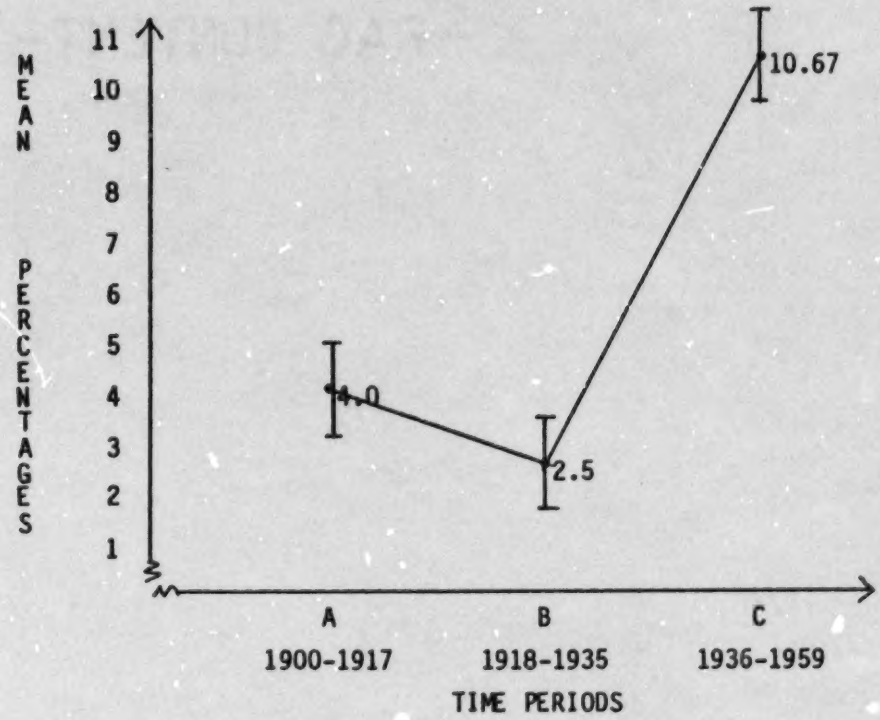


TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(1380.93)	(2)		
Linear	149.34	1	149.34	1.24
Quadratic	79.98	1	79.98	<1
S/A	5666.28	47	120.56	
TOTAL	7047.21	49		p<.10

Confidence interval LSI = $y \pm 1.11$

Trend Analysis of Factor Eleven: Related Skills



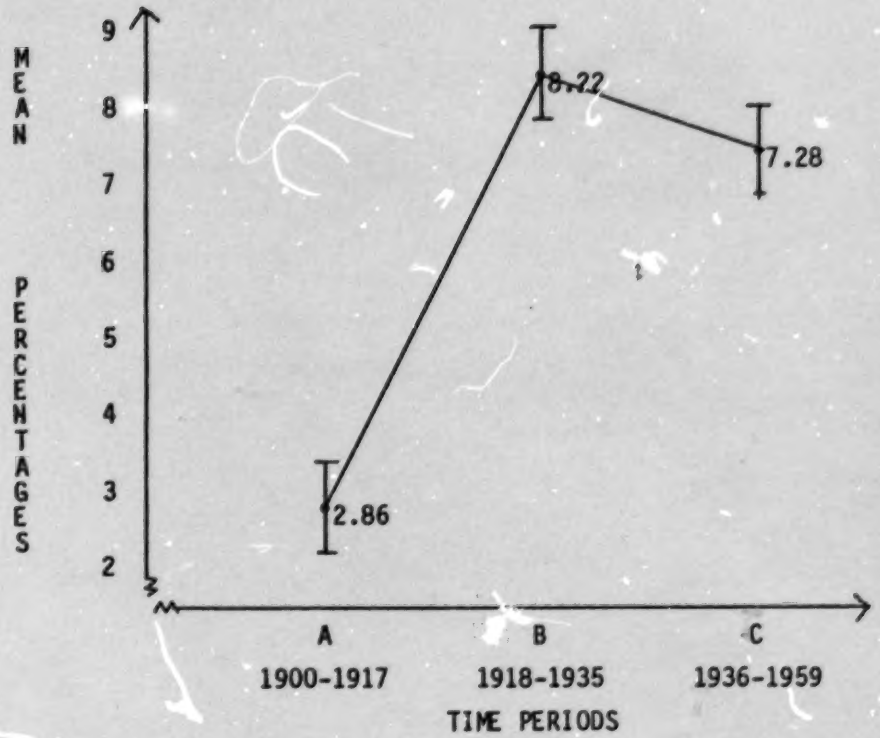
TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(620.02)	(2)		
Linear	797.1	1	797.1	33.74*
Quadratic	239.25	1	239.25	10.13**
S/A	1110.33	47	23.62	
TOTAL	1730.35	49		

* $p<.001$
** $p<.01$

Confidence interval LSI = $y \pm .491$

Trend Analysis of Factor Twelve: Residuals



TREND ANALYSIS

Source	SS	dF	MS	F
Intertrial	(268.52)	(2)		
Linear	59.21	1	59.21	2.58
Quadratic	85.31	1	85.31	3.72*
S/A	1077	47	22.91	
TOTAL	1345.52	49		* p<.10

Confidence interval LSI = y $\pm$ .484